

**MetroWest Commission on the Status of Women  
Annual Report  
May 2018**

**MetroWest Commissioners**

Cathy Ashton- Wayland  
Jean Bertschmann- Hopkinton  
Stephanie Deeley- Framingham  
Patricia Hohl- Framingham  
Heather Panahi- Wellesley.  
Nancy Rosenblum- Ashland  
Ceylan Rowe- Northborough  
Denise Schultz- Franklin  
Margareth Shepherd- Framingham

Our goal as a Commission, beyond our mission statement as defined in our by-laws, is to strengthen our ability to advocate on behalf of MetroWest women. We seek to do this by listening, learning, and informing ourselves about the issues that matter to the majority of women in our region, determine effective outreach strategies and developing a robust list of stakeholders. These efforts are intended to improve our ability to play a role in the support and advancement of women and the promotion of their rights and opportunities.

**2017-2018 Findings & Accomplishments**

**Membership:**

Cathy Ashton reappointed to a 3 year term

**New Members:**

Stephanie Deeley  
Heather Panahi

**Outgoing Members:**

Jen Maseda  
Heather Wightman

**Officers Elected:**

Ceylan Rowe, Chair  
Nancy Rosenblum, Vice-Chair  
Jean Bertschmann, Secretary  
Denise Schultz, Director of Legislation  
Stephanie Deeley, Director of Communications

Summary: The MetroWest Commission continues it's goal to increase awareness and outreach while advocating for issues identified as our priority issues. The areas include:

- Equal Pay
- Paid Family & Medical Leave
- Women in Transition
- Women Running for Office
- Affordable Housing
- Housing Court
- Healthy Relationships-Dating Violence
- Healthy Relationship-Sexual Bullying
- Sexting
- Pipeline to Prison
- DV/SA Against Women & Girls
- Civil Rights and Safety

The following will detail activities the MWCSW engaged in to reach those goals:

**Meetings:**

These priority areas were the focus and topics of the Commission's monthly public meetings.

The Commission welcomed former South Middlesex County Corrections Superintendent, Lisa Jackson, to a meeting. Ms. Jackson retired last year, after a long career working with incarcerated women. She worked with former Commissioner Heather Wightman in her role at Ria House.

Superintendent Jackson provided the Commission with a broad overview of women in the criminal justice system: the circumstances; programming; and demographics of women prisoners. The per/offender cost at MCI Framingham per year is \$67,103, as compared to a per/offender cost at SMCC of \$41,860. 28% of inmates at MCI Framingham are pre-trial inmates. The average age is 37. 59% have a sentence of more than 3 years. 52% have a violent governing offense. 32% have lower than a 9th grade reading level. 33% have less than a 6th grade math level. 70% of women have open mental health cases, and 66% are on psychotropic drugs. A recidivism study is done every 3 years. The last one was in 2015, and indicated that the recidivism rate for inmates released from lower security was 23%, and from medium or high security was 33%,

underscoring the benefit of a transition to lower security prior to release. The average length of stay at MCI Framingham was 938 days; at SMCC it was 200 days. The challenges of the work program through SMCC include finding transportation and appropriate placements. The Department of Corrections has strict requirements regarding appropriate placements and payment for inmates. Inmates who participate are able to be released having earned money to get them started on a new path. Cost of commissary items within the prison are higher than market rates.

Superintendent Jackson suggested several possible courses of action for the Commission to support:

- Alternatives to Incarceration: Drug Courts; diversion programs; Mental Health Courts.
- Diversion to community-based treatment programs, with trauma-informed training.
- Revise the bail system.
- Expand the use of probation.
- Expand employment opportunities for pre-release women.
- Fill a seat on the Community Advisory Board for MCI Framingham.

She stressed that changes happen slowly, person-to-person, and the importance of continuing to try to highlight the challenges for this population.

### **Survey Results:**

In 2017 we conducted a survey to the women in our region.

77 women responded. A few questions we asked were:

1. Please check the top THREE issues you see as the greatest barriers to your personal economic stability.

Answers: Cost of high education, cost of healthcare, and low retirement savings.

2. Please list the top THREE issues you see as the greatest barriers to your personal health and wellness:

Answers: Medical costs and/or health insurance too expensive, health insurance deductibles too high, and lack of mental health services and lack of affordable housing were tied.

3. Which of the following issues would you consider taking action to change?  
Please check up to THREE.

Answers: Affordable higher education, equal pay for equal work, and affordable health care.

### **Legislative Advocacy & Awareness**

Legislative Priorities include:

**Housing Court Expansion** S.946 (Sen. Spilka) / H.978 (Rep. Walsh)

**Protect Access to Confidential Healthcare (PATCH)** S.591 (Sen. Spilka) / H.2960 (Rep. Hogan)

**Girl's Bill** S.49 (Sen. Forry)/H.119 (Rep. Tyler)

**Campus Climate Surveys** H.2998 (Rep. Ehrlich)

**Sexual Violence on Higher Education Campuses** S.706 (Sen. Moore) / H.632 (Reps. Farley-Bouvier and Donahue)

**Compliance with Anti-Shackling Law for Pregnant Incarcerated Women** S.1359 (Sen. Spilka) / H.2494 (Rep. Khan)

**Protect the Civil Rights and Safety of All Massachusetts Residents (Safe Communities)** S.1305 (Sen. Eldridge, Sen. Lewis, Rep. Lewis) / H.3269 (Rep. Matias)

**Transmitting Indecent Visual Depictions by Teens** H.948 (Rep. Roy)

**Supporting Working Parents Who Run for Public Office** (Child care tax credit for candidates) S. 386 (Sen. Jehlen)/ H.2898 (Reps. Connolly and Meschino)

There were great successes in the 190th Session Massachusetts General Court. These included:

**Protect Access to Confidential Healthcare (PATCH):** The MWCSW celebrated the passage of PATCH in February 2018. This bill fixes a crucial barrier to accessing health care by ensuring that when multiple people are on the same insurance plan, confidential health care information is not shared with anyone other than the patient.

**ACCESS** S.499 (Sen. Chandler)/ H.536 (Reps. Haddad and Scibak): The MWCSW celebrated the passage of ACCESS in November 2017. The bill ensures that Massachusetts residents continue to have access to affordable birth control by requiring state insurers to cover birth control without a copay.

**Housing Court Expansion** (S.946 H. 978) Sen Karen Spilka and Rep. Chris Walsh

Currently, 1/3 of the population in MA has no access to Housing Court. That includes several towns in the MetroWest. In Framingham, the largest town in the MetroWest, just over 45% of the homes are rental homes in a town of nearly 70,000 people.

Housing Court helps both tenants and landlords. It has the expertise in federal, state and local laws and the specialists who can mediate these often complicated cases.

Imagine how complicated housing issues can be for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking; issues that include no contact orders, the ability to change locks, early lease termination for victims who need to flee violence, and situations where domestic violence victims are evicted because they've called police one too many times... the result being that these victims don't call police so as not to make trouble, so as not to get evicted.

We need specialists and mediators well versed in federal and state protections in these areas. But as of now, ***a victim's chances of staying safe can depend upon what town he/she lives in.***

The Housing Court has judges and staff with expertise in housing law and who are trained to provide tenants and landlords with a fair court process. Both landlords and tenants can access the resources that only Housing Courts have, including the Tenancy Preservation Program, Lawyer for the Day Programs and Housing Specialists. Homeless can be prevented and municipalities can address serious housing and health code violations more efficiently and effectively.

The current situation creates **unequal access** to state services. It is difficult to understand why 2/3 of the state should have access to the expertise and programs of Housing Court while 1/3 of our state does not. S.946 will change this inherently unfair system, making Housing Court accessible to all the citizens of Massachusetts – not just some citizens.

On July 17, 2017, the FY18 budget expanded the housing court to all remaining unserved cities and towns and the Governor quickly announced vacancies for two housing court judges. Most recently, the Senate Ways & Means Committee budget included full funding for the housing court expansion and an increase in the Tenancy Protection Program and the Governor has nominated new housing court judges.

**Testimony:**

**Healthy Youth:** Commissioner and Legislative Director, Denise Schultz, represents the MWCSW on the Healthy Youth Coalition. Denise testified of the Healthy Youth Bill S.234 (Sen. Spilka) /H.2053 (Rep. O'Day).

**Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML):** Commissioner Denise Schultz represents the MWCSW on the PFML Coalition. Denise testified of PFML hearing.

**Transmitting Indecent Visual Depictions by Teens:** Commissioner Denise Schultz testified on November 28, 2017 to the Committee the importance of bill H.948 (Rep. Roy).

### **Communications:**

The MWCSW currently has 330 people following us on Facebook. We had over 150 people attend our events in 2017. We are building and expanding our email subscriber list. We look forward to growing our social media presence and outreach.

### **Public Outreach and Awareness:**

On July 28, 2017 Commissioners Cathy Ashton, Denise Schultz, Margareth Shepard, Nancy Rosenblum, and Ceylan Rowe attended a tour of MCI Framingham, hosted by Rep. Jack Lewis, and also attended by Senator Karen Spilka and Rep. Carolyn Dykema. The tour was led by the Government Relations Liaison, Superintendent, and Deputy Superintendent for the prison. Several programs were highlighted that included Cosmetology, Culinary Arts, College courses, America's Vet Dogs, and Transitional Housing Program.

There is a 33% recidivism rate. Some potential follow up suggestions are more educational programming through Framingham State and other institutions, expand services for pre-trial detainees, and offer more programs where woman can obtain employment after being released.

In July, Commissioners Patricia Hohl and Jen Maseda met with Sigma Sorority. They are interested in upcoming election voter information and registration.

November 14, 2017 Commissioners Nancy Rosenblum, Ceylan Rowe, and Margareth Shaperd attended the Semi-Annual Convening of Regional Commissions. There was a discussion regarding common challenges facing all commissions in terms of websites, funding for events, obtaining a PO Box, and a lack of ability to fundraise.

October 16, 2017, the MWCSW hosted a Teen Sexting Forum at Franklin High School. Senator Karen Spilka, Representative Jeff Roy, Professor Elizabeth Englander, Officer Christopher Spillane, members of the Algonquin SheHawks (feminist high school club,) Franklin Public Schools Superintendent attended the event.

Under existing law, the two options available are to do nothing, or to charge a minor with a felony and a sex offender classification, which frequently seems unduly punitive given the circumstances. The bill introduced by Representative Roy would create a misdemeanor offense for minors, and give the District Attorney's office the option to offer diversion and education programs which, if completed, would eliminate the record. The bill does not prevent consensual sexting, but would address the unauthorized distribution of the sext.

He is working with Dr. Englander's team to create an education program to be offered to districts through the Department of Education. Professor Englander works at the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center, at Bridgewater State University. She and her team are studying the effects of sexting. The long term effects are unknown, given the recent genesis of the issue. They are continuing to study the emotional trauma caused in the immediate term by the victims. Her research is indicating that the unauthorized distribution of the sext and the ramifications from that are often more traumatic than the original incident. She described the pressure on children to engage in sexting, as well as the difference in perspective between teens and adults regarding appropriate privacy of body parts.

Dr. Englander feels that Representative Roy's bill offers an opportunity for education. There are online resources available through MARC to help parents have conversations regarding healthy relationships, family values, and privacy. Although there are some technology fixes available, most have too many work-arounds that teens can utilize.

Officer Spillane mentioned teens use existing images to leverage victims into providing more images, and described some of the technology teens use in hiding these pictures from adult view on their phones. He said that schools can help address these issues through curricula and peer mentoring programs.

May 2, 2018 the MWCSW hosted a public hearing at the Framingham Library. We heard and read testimony on issues related to affordable housing, equal pay, special education, online bullying, harassment toward undocumented women,

elder services, employment training for women at MCI Framingham, immigration lawyers not providing services after receiving payments, and lack of respect from some healthcare providers towards women.

## **2018 Focus & Strategy**

### **PRIORITY LEGISLATION**

- ☐ Housing Court Expansion S.946 (Sen. Spilka) / H.978 (Rep. Walsh)
- ☐ Campus Climate Surveys H.2998 (Rep. Ehrlich)
- ☐ Sexual Violence on Higher Education Campuses S.706 (Sen. Moore) / H.632 (Reps. Farley-Bouvier and Donahue)
- ☐ Compliance with Anti-Shackling Law for Pregnant Incarcerated Women S.1359 (Sen. Spilka) / H.2494 (Rep. Khan)
  
- ☐ Protect the Civil Rights and Safety of All Massachusetts Residents (Safe Communities) S.1305 (Sen. Eldridge, Sen. Lewis, Rep. Lewis) / H.3269 (Rep. Matias)
- ☐ Transmitting Indecent Visual Depictions by Teens H.948 (Rep. Roy)
- ☐ Supporting Working Parents Who Run for Public Office (Child care tax credit for candidates) S. 386 (Sen. Jehlen)/ H.2898 (Reps. Connolly and Meschino)

### **SUPPORTED LEGISLATION**

- ☐ Healthy Youth S.234 (Sen. DiDomenico)/ H.2053 (Rep. O'Day)
- ☐ Paid Family Medical Leave S.1048 (Sen. Spilka)/ H.2172 (Rep. Gordon)
- ☐ Preventing the Sexual Abuse of Children and Youth S.295 (Sen. Lovely)
- ☐ An Act to promote homelessness protection in MA S.831 Sen. DiDomenico / H.968 (Rep. Tyler)
- ☐ An Act to strengthen laws combating human trafficking and protecting survivors of modern-day slavery S.905 (Sen. Montigny)
- ☐ Enhancing the Lives of Survivors of Human Trafficking S.906 (Sen. Montigny) / H.766 (Rep. Day)
- ☐ An Act to prevent human trafficking and sexual exploitation in bodyworks establishments S.907 (Sen. Montigny)
- ☐ An Act to Keep Siblings Together S.75 (Sen. Spilka)
- ☐ Protecting Girls from Genital Mutilation S.788 (Sen. Chandler)/ H.2333 (Rep. Peake)

In addition to it's legislative advocacy, the Commission is focused on the following areas for the upcoming year:

Teen Sexting  
Salary Negotiation



Workplace Equality  
Safe Communities Act  
Education  
Violence and Abuse on Campus  
Safety & Wellbeing  
Healthcare

**Goals for 2018**

- Increase awareness and advocate for issues identified as our prior areas of focus.
- Connect organizations in the Metro West with each other.
- Create an ongoing list of Community Leaders.
- Increase awareness of MWCSW through social media, hosting events, attending events, and creating brochures to leave in public spaces.

Submitted by: Ceylan Rowe, Chair, MetroWest Commission on the Status of Women.